

Census 2020 aids government in charting socioeconomic action plans

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WHEN it was announced that a Malaysia Population and Housing Census (Census 2020) was to be carried out from July 7, it didn't quite catch the attention of the populace.

Chief statistician Datuk Seri Dr Mohd Uzir Mahidin had to go on national television and to the press, time and again, to grab Malaysians' attention on how important Census 2020 was.

Like many people across the globe caught in the Covid-19 pandemic web, far too many Malaysians gave little attention to the plea made by the chief statistician.

With 24 days left to the Sept 30 deadline, only one million Malaysians have completed the e-Census, which is very low compared with our population of 32 million.

The chief statistician was also disappointed with poor response from state capitals as he expected higher participation from densely-populated areas with good access to the Internet.

For the second phase, the Statistics Department will interview 70 per cent of the population starting from Oct 7 to 24 to enumerate the population.

By year end, the Malaysian population is expected to rise to 33.8 million; 16.2 million males and 17.5 million females.

Since we now live in a moment of uncertainty, mired in human crisis and unending conflicts, exacerbated by declining global food production, we start to ponder whether the world population will stop growing.

Five years ago, the United Nations predicted that the global population could surpass 11 billion by the end of the century and the UN projection has been the status quo — until now.

Plenty of signs have pointed to there being a population plateau, but recent research from the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME), published in The Lancet, suggests that the number of people on this planet may actually start to shrink well before the year 2100.

According to the UN, the world population is set to steadily rise over the years. By 2030, it will rise to 8.5 billion, 9.7 billion by 2050 and 10.9 billion by 2100. In contrast, IHME paints a different picture. It projects the population to actually peak at 9.7 billion in 2064.

Following this trajectory, there could be 8.8 billion people in 2100, approximately two billion fewer than previously thought.

Various demographic factors are behind these differences, namely higher life expectancy, migration rates and lower fertility rates. For this last factor, independent drivers, including contraceptive access and higher educational attainment, were also considered.

A shifting age structure is also a key aspect of this transition. By 2100, nearly 2.37 billion will be aged 65 and above.

In 2017, the five most populous countries were China with 1.4 billion followed by India (1.38 billion), the United States (325 million), Indonesia (258 million) and Pakistan (218 million). In 2100, it's projected India will have 1.09 billion, followed by Nigeria (791 million), China (732 million), the US (336 million) and Pakistan (248 million).

IHME predicts the populations of India and China will begin to contract after the mid-century, with China's total dropping almost half by 2100.

In fact, four of the top 10 populous countries in terms of population count are located in Sub-Saharan Africa — Congo, Ethiopia, Egypt and Tanzania.

Coming back to us, Census 2020, the sixth in the Malaysia Population and Housing census since 1970, provides a comprehensive and detailed resident and housing statistics for the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the population.

It also provides fundamental information for monitoring the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which includes a commitment to eradicate poverty, and to promote equality and environment sustainability. Additional questions on health, lifestyle and social relations are included in the census to see the changing lifestyle patterns in society.

Census 2020 is a centralised and comprehensive system with improved online features that provides a unified and integrated framework covering the process of complex data collection, analysis and dissemination.

Having the right statistics of the population gives the government a strategic platform to chart socioeconomic action plans for the country over the next 10 years.

<https://www.nst.com.my/opinion/columnists/2020/09/622189/census-2020-aids-government-charting-socioeconomic-action-plans>